Project Safe Home (PSH), a three-year pilot program begun in August 2008, focused on increasing housing options for domestic violence victims and their families while utilizing existing affordable housing more efficiently. PSH partnered with domestic violence shelters, property managers, and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to facilitate a steady stream of appropriate applicants for apartments funded with low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC). PSH also increased housing readiness among domestic violence survivors in shelter by offering interactive workshops that provided information about the housing search and application process in New York City. Over 3 years, PSH placed 122 families in permanent housing.

Housing and Domestic Violence Survivors: The Problem
Most women leave the City’s domestic violence shelter system without safe, stable housing — still homeless and at risk of abuse. At the same time, many low-income housing tax credit units set aside for homeless residents remain vacant while property managers seek to fill the units with tenants matching the income requirements. PSH sought to address this problem by pre-screening and matching potential applicants with high-quality, affordable vacant units in LIHTC projects.

Households desperately in need of housing continue to live in unstable situations—doubled up or homeless—while affordable units remain empty.

PSH’s Program Model

**PSH Step 1: Housing Readiness Workshop Series**
PSH conducted housing readiness workshops for HRA shelter residents. PSH workshops included information about what landlords consider and look for in the application process, based on New Destiny’s experience as a property manager. Workshop topics included: available housing subsidies, the preparation of a strong housing application, the housing interview process, budgeting for rent and credit/credit repair for housing.

**PSH Step 2: Individual Counseling**
Clients completing the housing readiness series were eligible for individual counseling and screening appointments with PSH staff. The client’s credit record, housing court records and criminal background were reviewed. Housing barriers, such as utility bills, rent arrears, housing court litigation, and violent criminal background, were identified. PSH staff explained how barriers could affect the resident’s housing eligibility and created an individualized action plan to address and reduce barriers.

**PSH Step 3: Screening and Matching Clients to Apartment**
PSH screened for clients who were eligible and appropriate for the housing available through PSH’s network of landlords. PSH kept an inventory of available apartments set aside by participating landlords and matched clients based on safety, location, family size and successful completion of individual action plan. Placement in housing was never guaranteed even after a match was found. But, by developing working relationships with landlords, PSH was able to increase the likelihood of successful matches over the course of the pilot. Over 78% of applications submitted through Project Safe Home were approved by landlords.

**PSH Step 4: Housing Application**
PSH streamlined the housing application process by mastering its complexity and acting as an effective intermediary. The program worked with eligible residents to complete and strengthen their housing applications and to ensure that the packages delivered to landlords included required documentation as well as the credit report and criminal background check. PSH also worked with clients to compose letters of explanation around housing barriers. PSH collected and reviewed all the key documents and coordinated the sequencing of the paper work among the shelter, the landlord, and HRA.

**PSH Step 5: Post Placement Surveys for Moved in clients**
Project Safe Home followed up with clients for one year after placement in permanent housing through phone and mail surveys to assess tenants’ housing stability and safety. PSH staff liaised with landlord partners when issues arose to enhance clients housing stability. No PSH clients were evicted during the pilot period.

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1 Data collected by New Destiny Housing through its Housing Link “Statistics for Advocacy” Project
**Successes: Strong Partnerships**

PSH opened up a previously untapped resource – LIHTC apartments – to DV shelter residents. The PSH placements were achieved through building relationships with key partners (landlords, shelters, and HRA) that helped move housing-ready tenants into high-quality affordable apartments. By all accounts, PSH increased the capacity of all three groups to carry out their respective roles in the housing application process and achieve their organizational goals. All three partners repeatedly stated that PSH’s housing expertise, careful paper work management, and multiple coordinating activities systematized a previously disorganized interaction among landlords, shelter providers and HRA officials.

- PSH partnered with landlords to help shelter applicants navigate the application process to fill available apartments with quality tenants.

*PSH really enhanced the service that we were providing. We are happy to have them play the liaison role that linked the shelter’s clients to landlords with apartments and city agencies with rental subsidies.* – Shelter Provider

- PSH partnered with HRA shelters to identify and pre-screen shelter residents.

*I give them [PSH] a lot of credit. They coordinated steps, ironed out conflicts, and generally facilitated the complicated application process that could be very intimidating for some of our clients.* – HRA Official

- PSH partnered with HRA to help facilitate the application process through City and State agencies.

**Program Outcomes**

Project Safe Home met or exceeded most of its program goals during the 3-year period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurable Event</th>
<th>Cumulative Goals</th>
<th>Cumulative Outcomes</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># LIHTC Landlords Participating</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>120%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Shelters Participating</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>105%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Workshop series conducted</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>160%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # individual Workshops conducted</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>194%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Clients Participating</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>138%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Clients Completing</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>106%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Clients with Applications Submitted</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Clients with Applications Approved</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Client Move-ins *</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*On March 14, 2011 NYC ended Advantage/NY. There were no longer any major rental subsidies available. The lack of a rental subsidy made it increasingly difficult to place shelter residents in permanent housing. PSH has continued to educate and screen shelter residents. In addition, PSH had moved a limited number of residents into apartments using existing relationships.*
Barriers and Recommendations

The program encountered two major barriers to housing DV shelter residents and their families: (1) the scarcity of reliable and appropriate housing subsidies and (2) the short length of stay in emergency shelters.

**Barrier: Housing Subsidy.** Stable, safe housing is a primary requirement of women and children made homeless by domestic violence. Without housing, survivors are at risk of continued homelessness and domestic violence. Most homeless domestic violence survivors will require rental subsidies to afford housing in high-cost New York City. Any housing subsidy program developed for this population must address their particular situation and needs.

**Recommendations**
- Provide qualified homeless domestic violence survivors with regular access to New York City homeless housing resources, such as HPD Section 8 vouchers and homeless set aside units
- Streamline the application process for NYCHA Section 8 vouchers and NYCHA public housing resources so that it is better aligned with the short length of stay in emergency shelter

**Barrier: Short Length of Shelter Stay.** In HRA’s domestic violence emergency system, the maximum length of stay is 135 days which is too short to heal from the trauma of the abuse or to qualify, find and apply for housing. The system is used by the vast majority of homeless domestic violence victims. The short length of stay was one of the most difficult barriers Project Safe Home encountered in trying to place shelter residents in permanent housing.

**Recommendations**
- Change the NYS regulations to extend the length of stay in emergency shelters to at least 180 days
- Develop more transitional shelters specifically for domestic violence survivors
- Institute a “seamless transition” from domestic violence shelters into the DHS general homeless system instead of requiring emergency shelter residents to re-qualify as “homeless” at PATH, the gateway to the DHS system
- Give higher priority to domestic violence survivors for federal and City resources
- Streamline the application process for these resources so that it is better aligned with the short length of stay in emergency shelter

The Project Safe Home pilot resulted in a well-regarded program that successfully placed 122 homeless families from domestic violence shelters in safe, rent-stabilized, high-quality housing. During the pilot, PSH established itself as an effective intermediary between shelter providers, LIHTC landlords and HRA. It also successfully opened up a quality housing resources to DV survivors in the HRA shelter system. PSH staff members were able to adapt the program in response to changes in the larger environment, feedback from partners, and increased understanding of the housing application process.

Although the pilot officially ended in August 2011, Project Safe Home continues to train, pre-screen, and place DV survivors in the HRA shelter system in LIHTC, high-quality affordable housing and build new innovative partnerships.
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